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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BASRAH 000043

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TAGS: [POL](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [PTER](#) [IZ](#) [SY](#) [IR](#)
SUBJECT: ONE BAATHIST LEADER SEEKS "GREEN LIGHT" FROM USG TO RETURN
TO IRAQ WHILE ANOTHER VOWS TO CONTINUE ARMED RESISTANCE

BASRAH 00000043 001.2 OF 002

CLASSIFIED BY: John Naland, Leader, PRT Basra, Dept of State.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) Summary: Awad al-Abdan, General Secretary of the Movement for the Liberation of the South, briefed PRT officials July 15 on his recent meeting in Syria with senior-ranking officials from two factions of the Baath party command. Al-Abdan met with Ahmed Younis al-Ahmed, who reportedly expressed a desire to re-engage himself and his followers peacefully in Iraq's democratic process. Al-Abdan also met with Mohamed al-Murshadi, the spokesman of former vice president Izat Ibrahim al-Duri -- the highest-ranking Baathist still at large. Al-Duri, according to his spokesman, recognizes that the political landscape in Iraq has changed and is urging his followers to join the political process. That said, al-Duri is reportedly continuing to wage armed struggle in Salah ad Din, and is funding renewed resistance efforts by the al-Nakshabendi Army. Though al-Abdan's motives for the meetings remain unclear, he may have seen a chance to gain political support from adversarial Baathist leaders, and ultimately a seat in the national parliament. End summary.

A Baathist Leader in Poor Health...

12. (C) Al-Abdan said that he met with al-Ahmed a month ago in Damascus in a three-story building that the Government of Syria (GOS) has provided Al-Ahmed for his use. Al-Abdan expressed surprise at the GOS's largesse, given that it has continually denied al-Ahmed's presence in Syria. Al-Abdan said Al-Ahmed met him in his office, which was decorated with pictures of himself and Saddam Hussein at various events. Al Al-Ahmed told al-Abdan that his health was not good, and al-Abdan said that al-Ahmed had aged considerably.

13. (C) During the two-hour conversation, Al-Ahmed touched on various issues. He reported how the GOS had made life easy for him in Damascus in an effort to keep him from establishing relations with the U.S. or going to Iran. Al-Ahmed denied rumors that he had been in Iran, said he had no interest in going there, and in fact saw Iran as a bigger threat to Iraq than the U.S. Remarking on al-Duri, with whom he severed political ties in 2006, Al-Ahmed stated that he remained completely at odds with al-Duri and his post-Saddam positions and tactics.

Years to Come Home

14. (C) Al-Ahmed reportedly told al-Abdan of his desire to return to Iraq and engage peacefully in the political process without being subject to arrest by the USG or GOI. Al-Ahmed recognized that things had changed in Iraq, conceding that the

U.S. presence in Iraq was a "fact," as was the existence of political parties other than the Baath party. Al-Ahmed said all he needed was a "green light" from the USG to start the reintegration process.

15. (C) Also at the meeting were Abu Hussein (an official unknown to al-Abdan) and Ali Jabara, a high-ranking Baathist in Basra prior to 2003, who is now aligned with al-Ahmed. In subsequent conversation, Jabara assured al-Abdan of the sincerity of al-Ahmed's position. When al-Abdan asked if al-Ahmed had been speaking personally or officially, Jabara said his statements had been official, made on behalf of all Baathists in his camp. Jabara stressed that Al-Ahmed's conversation should be treated confidentially and not divulged to anyone in the GOS.

Saddam's Former VP Continues Armed Struggle...

16. (C) While in Damascus, al-Abdan said that he also met with Mohamed al-Murshadi the spokesman for Izat Ibrahim al-Duri. Al-Murshadi reportedly said that al-Duri and his followers were currently in Salah ad Din waging an armed struggle. He added that al-Duri's camp, which al-Abdan characterized as much better organized and funded than al-Ahmed's camp, was funding the al-Nakshabendi Army for a new resistance effort in Iraq. Al-Abdan could not ascertain whether the army would launch attacks before U.S. forces departed or wait for the U.S. pullout and target only Iraqi security forces.

While Seeking Power through the Ballot Box

17. (C) Al-Abdan said that al-Murshadi readily dismissed his pleas for al-Duri's camp to stop its violence and "save Iraqi blood." Al-Murshadi said that armed struggle would continue,

BASRAH 00000043 002.2 OF 002

but added that al-Duri's followers would also seek power through the political process. Al-Murshadi said that al-Duri had changed his political thinking in recognition of the political realities in Iraq. Al-Duri was looking to fund one or more political parties that sympathize with the Baathists, and was urging his followers to run for national office as independents.

He added that al-Duri did not want to support or ally with Dialogue Front, because al-Duri viewed its leader, Saleh al-Mutlak, as closely aligned with the U.S.

Bionote

18. (C) Awad al-Abdan, formerly head of the southern branch of the Dialogue Front, is the founder and General Secretary of the Movement for the Liberation of the South. His movement seeks to diminish Iranian influence in southern Iraq through peaceful means. These include public anti-Iranian demonstrations, conferences designed to highlight Iranian influence, and economic boycotts of Iranian goods (the second one is scheduled for launch on September 1). They may also include legal actions; Al-Abdan is considering a lawsuit against Mohamed Nasir Rida Bagbayan, the Iranian Consul General in Basra since 2003, for supposed interference in Iraqi internal affairs, including violation of Iraqi High Election Commission restrictions placed on him during the last elections. Al-Abdan is weighing a run for public office, and told us that more than various parties, including the Iraqi National Accord and the Dialogue Front, had approached him about joining their coalitions for the national elections in January. Al-Abdan declined to divulge his plans, but said that if he did run for office, he would be looking to align with a coalition after the election.

Comment

19. (C) Al-Abdan denies having been a member of the Baath party, but recent meetings with two senior Baath officials in competing camps certainly raise questions. An obvious one is the motivation for his meetings in Syria. Al-Abdan's strong anti-Iranian views (shared by the Baathists), his founding of a movement to capitalize on them, and his easy access to Baathist leaders could be read as signs that he is courting Baathist support. As both al-Ahmed and al-Duri seek to join the political process overtly or covertly, Al-Abdan may have seen a chance to gain their political support, and ultimately a seat in the national parliament. End comment.

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